



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1266.0 - Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, 2011

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## About the classification



### ABOUT THE CLASSIFICATION

## OVERVIEW

Religious affiliation provides a useful indicator of aspects of the cultural diversity of Australia's society. The first edition of the *Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups* (ASCRG) was published in 1996 and the second edition was published in 2005. The need for periodic reviews to reflect changes in the religious profile of Australia was foreshadowed when the ASCRG was first released.

This 2011 minor review of the ASCRG resulted in minimal change as shown in the

## 'Summary of Changes'.

The 2011 classification (along with its indexes and correspondences etc.) is available in Excel from the Downloads tab.

## Classification uses

The ASCRG is for use in collecting, aggregating and disseminating data relating to the religious affiliation of the Australian population, or subsets of the population. It is used to classify religion data from ABS surveys and the Census of Population and Housing.

Data classified by religion can be used for policy and planning purposes related to the location and development of educational facilities and church buildings, aged persons' care facilities and services, and the provision of other social services by religious organisations. The classification enhances the usefulness of data used to assist in assigning chaplains and other care providers to hospitals, prisons, armed services, universities, and other institutions. It can also be used to determine the allocation of time to particular community groups on public radio and in other media, and is a useful tool in general sociological research.

## First edition of the ASCRG 1996

The first edition of the ASCRG was developed by the ABS after extensive research of Australian and overseas literature, employment of statistical principles and techniques relating to statistical classification, and analysis of existing data relating to the religious profile of Australia (primarily data from the 1991 Census). This was supported by information and advice from academics and religious experts, and by consultation with community and religious groups interested in this topic.

In the classification, religious groups are arranged into progressively broader categories on the basis of similarity in terms of religious beliefs, religious practices and the cultural heritage of adherents. This results in those religious groups which are closely related in terms of their intrinsic characteristics being closely aligned in the structure of the classification. So people with similar religious beliefs are grouped together to produce a classification that is useful for both social analysis and planning purposes.

To make the classification as useful as possible, the number of persons affiliated to particular religious groups was a significant factor in developing the classification structure. Religious groups with a large number of affiliated persons, such as Christian denominations, were extensively identified in the classification. Those religions with a small number of affiliated persons were not separately identified in the classification structure but were included in appropriate residual categories.

The identification of individual religions or denominations in the classification, and the way in which they are grouped, does not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the ABS concerning the relative merit or importance of particular religions or the people who practice them.

## Second edition of the ASCRG 2005

The Second Edition (2005 revision) of the classification included changes to the structure of the classification and the renaming of some religious groups. At the four-digit level, the structure was expanded from 107 religious groups to 115. The number of narrow groups fell from 33 to 32. No changes were made at the broad group level.

## **Second edition (Revision 1) of the ASCRG 2011**

The 2011 minor review of the classification resulted in minimal change. There was no change to the number of religious groups, narrow groups or broad groups.

### **DEFINITION OF RELIGION**

A precise definition of the concept of religion, or of what generally constitutes a 'religion', is difficult, because of the intangible and wide-ranging nature of the topic.

Generally, a religion is regarded as a set of beliefs and practices, usually involving acknowledgment of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense.

This method of defining religion in terms of a mixture of beliefs, practices, and a supernatural being giving form and meaning to existence, was used by the High Court of Australia in 1983. The High Court held that 'the beliefs, practices and observances of the Church of the New Faith (Scientology) were a religion in Victoria'.

As part of the ruling, it was stated that:

*For the purposes of the law, the criteria of religion are twofold: first, belief in a Supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief, though canons of conduct which offend against the ordinary laws are outside the area of any immunity, privilege or right conferred on the grounds of religion.*

The above definition is useful in describing the nature of the entities included in the classification (apart from the major group 'No Religion', it includes all entities in the classification).

For instance:

- Buddhism is universally accepted as a religion because, although it does not acknowledge a personal God, it contains elements of belief in supernatural principles as well as canons of conduct.
- Confucianism is regarded as a religion, even though it involves no overt belief in the supernatural, because it provides a moral code for its adherents and because it contains elements of belief in supernatural principles.

But not all philosophies which involve beliefs about the nature of life or codes of behaviour are accepted as religions.

For instance:

- Marxism, although regarded as a religion by some, is more generally regarded as a political philosophy based on a coherent set of beliefs, without any supernatural or spiritual component, and is therefore excluded from the classification.

So the extent of opinion as to what constitutes a religion, practical considerations, and generally held notions about the nature of philosophies, organisations and institutions all play a role in defining religion or identifying the concepts that underpin religion. These

elements complement the more stringent notions of belief, accepted and widespread practices and canons of conduct and a supernatural being or principle included in the definition of religion. The definition provided here is regarded as sufficient for the purposes of the classification.

## SCOPE OF THE CLASSIFICATION

The scope of the classification is all religions and subsets of religions in the world as defined above. In practice, only those religious groups that have a significant number of affiliated persons in Australia are separately identified in the classification structure. However, all other religions are covered, notionally being included in the most appropriate residual category (Miscellaneous, Other, or Not elsewhere classified categories) of the classification. The code structure of the classification also allows the identification of religious groups not presently separately identified, if such a need arises.

### 'No religion' broad group

The classification also includes a 'No Religion' broad group which could be considered to be inconsistent with the basis of the classification as described above and outside the scope of the religion topic. It has been included for practical reasons and to make the classification more useful. Many statistical and administrative applications need to accommodate the whole range of responses to a question on religion, including the response 'No Religion'.

## Building the classification



### BUILDING THE CLASSIFICATION

#### DESIGN CONSTRAINTS

The theoretical and conceptual considerations for developing the classification were tempered by other considerations including:

- the practical usefulness of the classification for collecting data from both statistical and administrative collections,
- the analytical usefulness of data collected within the framework of the classification, and
- the number of Australians affiliated to each category at each level of the classification.

Generally, the classification criteria were applied in a straightforward manner. However, some decisions in regard to the identification of religious groups and the progressive grouping of units were made on the basis of whether it would be possible to collect data in relation to certain religious sub-sets or whether data for particular religions would be more useful if classified in a broader or finer manner. These decisions were made in consultation with religious and ethnic communities, religious experts and users of religion data.

The effect of these constraints on the classification has been that:

- some religious groups which are significant in a world context are not separately identified in the structure

- some broad groups are limited in the number of narrow groups they subsume
- some major world religions are represented at levels below the broad group level.

The most notable effect has been in the large number of narrow groups and religious groups represented as subsets of the broad group Christianity.

## **CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA AND THEIR APPLICATION**

The classification criteria are the principles by which the base level units of the classification are formed into classification categories which may be aggregated to form broader or higher-level categories in the classification structure.

Three classification criteria are used in the ASCRG to form the various levels of categories of the classification:

- similar religious beliefs;
- similar religious practices; and/or
- cultural heritage.

Religious groups, the most detailed level of the classification, are combined to form narrow groups (the middle level of the classification) on the basis of their similarity in terms of these criteria. Although the religious groups are not necessarily identical in any particular characteristics, the narrow groups formed are relatively homogeneous in terms of the set of classification criteria.

The most general level of the classification, the broad groups, were developed in a slightly different manner. On the basis of the number of affiliated persons worldwide, the major world religions are generally accepted as: Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Tao, Confucian, Tribal, Animist, and Jewish. It would seem appropriate to make these major religions, the broad groups in the classification, particularly as they are generally homogeneous in terms of the classification criteria (beliefs, practices, and cultural heritage). However, consideration of the number of adherents of each of these religions (in Australia) indicates that it is unacceptable in terms of the statistical balance of the classification to include Tao, Confucian, Tribal and Animist religions as broad groups.

Thus, on the basis of a broad application of all the classification criteria, supported by the size of the religions in Australia, the first five broad groups within the classification are:

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism

This application of the criteria enables the delineation of appropriate narrow groups (constructed on the basis of a more rigorous application of the criteria) as subsets (sub-categories) of these broad groups.

### **Additional broad groups**

There are two additional broad groups:

- Other Religions: The classification criteria are then applied so that other major world religions and residual narrow groups form a meaningful and useful classification structure within a residual broad group: Other Religions.
- No Religion: A further broad group (No Religion) has been included in the classification for practical reasons and to make the classification more useful. As this group consists of entities not considered to be religious groups it was not developed in accordance with the classification criteria specified above.

## CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURE

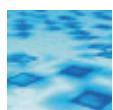
The ASCRG has a three-level hierarchical structure.

The third and most detailed level of the classification consists of base units known as 'religious groups'. The classification consists of 115 religious groups. Some religious groups are residual categories, or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

The second level of the classification comprises 32 'narrow groups'. Narrow groups comprise between one and 14 religious groups which are similar in terms of the classification criteria.

The first and most general level of the classification comprises seven 'broad groups'. These are formed by aggregating narrow groups (and hence religious groups) which are broadly similar in terms of the classification criteria. Broad Group 7 No Religion comprises entities which are identifiable and useful groupings which, while not satisfying the criteria of a religion, are necessary to enable the capture of the full range of responses to questions on religious affiliation.

## About codes



### ABOUT CODES

#### CODE SCHEME

A one-digit code is assigned to each first level unit in the classification. A two or three-digit code is assigned to each second level unit, and a four-digit code is assigned to each third-level unit.

#### Broad group level

The first level of the classification, the broad group level, comprises seven categories and provides a broad overall picture of the religious affiliation of the Australian population. The broad groups covering the major religions are arranged alphabetically, and are represented by one digit codes.

They are:

- 1 Buddhism
- 2 Christianity
- 3 Hinduism
- 4 Islam
- 5 Judaism
- 6 Other Religions
- 7 No Religion

### **Narrow group level**

The second and third levels of the classification - the narrow group and religious group levels respectively - provide increasingly detailed breakdowns of the broad groups.

Most narrow groups are represented by a three-digit code, the first digit indicating the broad group to which they belong. For example, within the Christianity broad group (code 2), Anglican is code 201, Baptist is code 203, and Brethren is code 205, etc.

### **Religious group level**

At the third and most detailed level, religious groups are represented by a four-digit code. The first three digits represent the broad and narrow groups to which they belong.

For example:

Religious groups 2012 Anglican Church of Australia, and 2013 Anglican Catholic Church, both fall within the Anglican narrow group (code 201) and the Christianity broad group (code 2).

```

2 Christianity
  201 Anglican
    2012 Anglican Church of Australia
    2013 Anglican Catholic Church
  
```

### **Why there are two-digit and three-digit codes in narrow groups**

Narrow groups generally consist of nine or less religious groups, thus allowing for the use of a three-digit narrow group code. However, an exception to this coding scheme was necessary for the narrow groups representing Pentecostal Religions (code 24), Other Protestant Religions (code 28), and Other Christian Religions (code 29). To allow these narrow groups to comprise more than nine religious groups without necessitating a five-digit code, they have each been allocated two-digit codes rather than three-digit codes.

For example:

The Pentecostal narrow group is represented by code 24, within which 14 religious groups are represented by four-digit codes ranging from 2401 Apostolic Church (Australia), to 2499 Pentecostal, nec.

```

2 Christianity
  24 Pentecostal
    2401 Apostolic Church (Australia)
    2402 Assemblies of God
    2403 Bethesda Churches
    2404 Christian City Church
  
```

- 2405 Christian Life Churches International
- 2406 Christian Outreach Centres
- 2407 Christian Revival Crusade
- 2408 Faith Churches
- 2411 Foursquare Gospel Church
- 2412 Full Gospel Church
- 2413 Revival Centres
- 2414 Rhema Family Church
- 2415 United Pentecostal
- 2499 Pentecostal, nec

If processing or storage systems require all categories at a particular level of the classification to use the same number of digits, it is recommended the codes of these three two-digit narrow groups are backfilled by use of the digit zero: 240 Pentecostal, 280 Other Protestant, 290 Other Christian.

### **Adding religious groups to the classification**

The religious profile of Australia is likely to change over time because of factors such as changing migration patterns. So it may be necessary to add religious groups to, or delete religious groups from, the lists of religious groups currently separately identified in the classification as the number of affiliated persons to particular religions changes. (All religious groups not separately identified in the classification are notionally included in a residual category.)

If a religious group needs to be added to (separately identified in) the classification structure, it is given the next available four-digit code, in the numerical sequence of codes, of the narrow group to which it is being added. The available four-digit codes are those ending in the numerals one to eight (four-digit codes ending in zero or nine are reserved for residual categories). The religious groups in narrow groups are generally in alphabetical order. However, this order of religious groups, while useful, is not imperative and is not considered in the addition of new religious groups.

If a religious group ceases to have a sufficient number of affiliated persons in Australia to justify it continuing to be separately identified in the classification, then it is deleted from the classification. If a religious group is deleted, its code would only be reallocated to another religious group in exceptional circumstances. Reallocating a code could cause confusion with time series data.

The ASCRG code scheme has been devised so that any changes to the classification structure can be easily accommodated. However, in order that the classification remain a standard, users should not make changes to the structure. Rather, users should contact the ABS and identify any problems they encounter in the course of implementation, data collection, or data analysis when using the classification.

## **CODES FOR RESIDUAL CATEGORIES**

### **'Not elsewhere classified' (nec)**

Some narrow groups include residual 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) religious group categories. These categories are represented by four-digit codes consisting of the two or three digits of the narrow group code, followed by the digits 99 or 9. All religious groups which are not separately identified in the classification are notionally included in the nec category of the narrow group to which they relate. The classification currently has 11 nec

categories at the religious group level for narrow groups where ABS experience indicates they are required.

### 'Other' or 'Miscellaneous'

In some broad groups, codes are also reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level. These codes consist of the broad group code followed by 9 or 99. These categories are termed 'Other' or 'Miscellaneous' categories and consist of separately identified religious groups which do not fit into other narrow groups on the basis of the classification criteria. The classification currently contains two such residual categories.

### Additional residual categories

Provision exists in the code structure for the creation of additional residual categories. If experience indicates the need for further residual categories the ABS will create them and add them to the classification structure. It should be noted that residual categories are part of the classification structure and should not be created or used merely to 'dump' responses containing insufficient data to code to a separately identified category of the classification (see: Supplementary codes below, and Coding rules).

## SUPPLEMENTARY CODES

Supplementary codes are used to process inadequately described responses in statistical collections and are listed separately in the ASCRG data cube.

It should be noted that supplementary codes are not part of the classification structure. They exist for operational reasons only, and no data would be coded to them if sufficiently detailed responses were obtained in all instances.

The codes are of three types:

- four-digit codes ending with one or more zeros;
- four-digit codes commencing with three zeros; and
- to meet specific needs.

### Supplementary codes ending in zero

Codes ending in zero are described as 'not further defined' (nfd) codes and are used to code responses to a question about religion which cannot be coded to the four-digit (religious group) level of the classification but which can be coded to a higher level of the classification structure.

For example, responses which cannot be identified as relating directly to a particular religious group, but which are known to be within the range of religions relating to a particular narrow group, are coded to that narrow group. Such responses are allocated an nfd code consisting of the two or three-digit code of the narrow group followed by 00 or 0.

Similarly, responses which do not contain sufficient information to be related directly to a particular religious group, or to a narrow group, but which are known to be within the range of religions relating to a particular broad group, are coded to that broad group. Such responses are allocated an nfd code consisting of the one-digit code of the broad group followed by 000. For instance, the response 'Christian' does not contain sufficient information to be related directly to a religious group or a narrow group, but it can be coded

to broad group 2 Christianity, which encompasses all Christian religions. So it is allocated the code 2000 Christianity, nfd.

Thus, religion responses which can only be coded at the broad or narrow group levels of the classification, can be processed within a collection, coded at the religious group level.

There are some cases where the classification structure would, in theory, support the creation of a supplementary nfd code not already included in the range of valid supplementary codes. For example, no nfd code has been created for narrow group 207 Catholic. The response 'Catholic' is allocated to the category 2071 Western Catholic.

### **Supplementary codes starting with zero**

Four-digit codes commencing with 000 are supplementary codes included for operational purposes to facilitate the coding of responses such as inadequately described religious affiliations, which present particular problems in that they cannot be allocated one particular religious group, narrow group or broad group code.

For example, responses such as 'all religions' and 'own religion' are coded to 0002 Religious Belief, nfd.

### **Supplementary codes for specific needs**

Additional supplementary codes have been included to meet specific needs and to maximise the value of data collected from statistical surveys.

For example, The Apostolic Church Australia (code 2401) is classified to narrow group 24 Pentecostal, and both The Apostolic Church of Queensland (code 2901) and The New Apostolic Church (code 2906) are classified to narrow group 29 Other Christian. The term 'Apostolic' lacks sufficient information to code to a specific narrow group, and to code such responses to 'Christian, nfd' (code 2000) would mean that useful information was lost. So supplementary code 2001 'Apostolic Church, so described', has been created to capture this information. The code 2001 is appropriate because any responses relating to it must necessarily lie within Broad Group 2 Christianity.

A similar approach has been taken for responses relating to the 'Church of God' (code 2002), 'Australian Christian Churches' (code 2003), and 'New Church Alliance' (code 2004).

For publication purposes, it is acceptable to aggregate all data classified to code 2001, code 2002, code 2003 and code 2004 to provide a total for Christian, nfd (code 2000).

## **Index for coding responses**



### **INDEX FOR CODING RESPONSES**

#### **WHY WE USE IT**

Responses provided in statistical and administrative collections do not always precisely reflect classification categories. A coding index is therefore necessary to act as a link

between responses and the classification, enabling responses to be assigned accurately and quickly to the appropriate category of the classification.

## HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED

The coding index has been developed to assist in the implementation and use of the classification and should be used when coding responses to questions relating to religious affiliation, religious denomination, etc. The coding index has been devised by reference to existing literature in the field, consultation with religious experts and ethnic and community groups, and by analysis of existing ABS data. It includes responses obtained in ABS statistical collections. It also contains a comprehensive list of the most probable responses to questions relating to religion and their correct classification codes.

The coding index as at 28 July 2011 is in the ASCRG data cube.

## CODING RULES

In developing the coding index a number of rules were followed in assigning index entries the correct classification code. It is recommended that these rules be adhered to when coding any response that does not appear in the coding index provided. Decisions were made in regard to index entries on the basis of appropriate research and examination of pertinent reference material.

The coding rules are as follows:

- Responses which relate directly to a religious group category are coded to that religious group. Such instances include responses which are an exact match with the religious group category title, responses which are an exact match with the religious group category title except in terms of alternative spelling, the use of abbreviations, etc., and responses which match the title in terms of the fundamental or basic words of the title and differ only in terms of qualifying or extraneous words.
- Responses which relate directly to a religious group because they describe an entity which is one of a group of religions comprising the religious group, or a subset of the religious group (denomination, administrative or organisational grouping, etc.) are coded directly to that religious group.
- Responses which cannot be identified as relating to a separately identified religious group in the classification are assigned a residual category code, or a supplementary code.

## Using the classification



### USING THE CLASSIFICATION

#### EDITING SPECIFICATIONS

The full range of valid codes should be used in all specifications, including when validating input codes at editing stage, manipulating data, and deriving output items. This is because some responses are given 'not further defined' (nfd) or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) codes

rather than the codes of clearly defined religious groups,

The full range of valid codes includes the classification structure and the supplementary codes.

All the codes are in the ASCRG data cube.

## CODING, STORAGE AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

Regardless of the level of aggregation envisaged for the dissemination of data, wherever possible, data should be captured, classified and stored at the four-digit level of the classification. Collecting and storing data at the four-digit level of the classification allows the greatest flexibility for the output of data, enables more detailed and complex analyses, facilitates comparisons with previous data using related classifications, and preserves information that may prove historically useful.

However, the constraints affecting each statistical collection or other application, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors, may not permit the output of data at the lower levels of the classification. Nevertheless, the use of a standard classification will enhance data comparability even though it may not always be possible to disseminate the data at the most detailed level.

The hierarchical structure of the classification allows users the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits their needs. Data can be presented at broad group, narrow group, or religious group level. If necessary, significant religious groups within a narrow group can be presented separately while the remaining religious groups within the narrow group are aggregated. The same principle can be used to highlight significant narrow groups within a broad group.

## About the review



### ABOUT THE REVIEW

#### PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

We did the review to:

- ensure the classification was up-to-date
- capture changes in the religious profile of Australia, enabling improvements to the classification in terms of religious groups covered
- correct any errors in the classification
- improve the coding index used to code responses to religious groups.

This was a minor review. There was no analysis of the conceptual model underpinning the classification. There was no review at the broad group level. There was no evidence to suggest that a more comprehensive review was necessary.

## **HOW IT WAS DONE**

### **Statistical analysis**

We analysed responses to the 2006 census religion question to identify:

- new religious groups
- religious groups whose number of affiliated persons had significantly increased
- religious groups whose number of affiliated persons had significantly declined.

Religions within 'not elsewhere classified' categories (which recorded over 1,000 responses) were assessed for inclusion as new religious groups of the classification.

### **External research**

We did extensive external research to:

- confirm the appropriate terminology to be used for categories in the classification
- supplement the Census data and stakeholder comments
- assess the accuracy of coding of religions.

### **Stakeholder consultation**

We consulted with a range of users, stakeholders, and experts in the field. We analysed their feedback along with other source material. The results were included in a revised draft. We did further consultation to ensure our information was accurate and comprehensive before making changes.

Stakeholders were generally satisfied with the classification. There were only minor changes requested and recommended for inclusion.

## **What's changed**



### **WHAT'S CHANGED**

#### **SUMMARY OF CHANGES**

There have been no changes to the broad, narrow or religious groups of the classification.

There have been changes to the coding index, including:

- three religious groups have been added to the published index
- four religious groups have been deleted from the published index
- two religious groups have been renamed and a misspelling in the previous edition has been corrected.

These changes are detailed below.

### **Published coding index changes**

The following entities have been added to the index due to growth. There was growth in these entities according to external research and 2006 Census data.

2499	Pentecostal City Life Church
2404	Pentecostal Christian City Church
4011	Alevi

The following entities have been deleted from the published coding index. They were deleted based on stakeholder consultation and low counts in the 2006 Census.

2311	Berith Sabbatarian
2311	Bible Christian Sabbatarian
2311	Church of God Adventist
2311	Steam Dead Ahead

### **Religious groups renamed**

Two groups have been renamed throughout the classification.

- The Sabians (Christians of St John the Baptist), also known as the Mandeans and coded to 6999 Religious Groups nec, have been renamed Mandaeans.
- The Latter Day Saints (Mormons), coded to 215 Latter Day Saints, have been amended to Latter-day Saints.

The misspelling of the Urantia Book Study Group (coded to 6999 under Religious Groups nec) has been corrected.

### **COMPARING CURRENT AND PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THE ASCRG**

Correspondence tables are available if users need to convert data from the second edition/second edition Revision 1 to the old first edition ASCRG.

Revision 1 of the Second edition did not result in any changes to the classification structure. So a correspondence is not required between the Second edition and the Second edition Revision 1. Consequently the Second edition and Second edition Revision 1 correspondences to the First edition are identical. Correspondences to the First edition are provided in the ASCRG data cube.

The correspondence table is reasonably straightforward because, in most cases, the base-level units of the editions of the classification (religious groups) retain a one-to-one relationship. The correspondence table itemises the code linkages between the religions, details the links between the broad groups and the narrow groups, and indicates the movement of particular religions between religion groups in the two structures.

In some instances, there is not a direct relationship between the religions or religion groupings of the structures of the two editions. Partial linkages at both the religion and

religion group level are indicated by including the word 'part' after the name of the religion or religion group concerned.

## About this Release

This is Revision 1 of the Second Edition of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups.

It is intended for use in coding census and survey data in all ABS publications.  
It is recommended for use by other government and non-government organisations.

To see the Classification Structure and Index files click on the Downloads tab.

## Explanatory Notes

## Abbreviations

### ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ASCRG	Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups
nec	not elsewhere classified
ndf	not further defined

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